

**APPLIED HOUSING RESEARCH  
INITIATIVE**

School of Public Affairs & Civic Engagement  
San Francisco State University

**California Cities' Emergency Housing Policies during COVID-19:  
Where is Equity?**

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September 6, 2022

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## Abstract

COVID-19 emergency housing policies emerged in the early months of spring 2020 as the pandemic shutdown some aspects of social and economic life, and as illness and death began to sweep across the U.S. Our research sought to understand whether COVID-19 served as a focusing event that brought equity into the forefront of emergency housing policies and, if so, to understand the ways in which HCD Directors and the cities they work for were concerned with equity in developing or implementing those emergency housing policies. This report summarizes findings from the *California Cities' Emergency Housing Policies Survey*. We find that COVID-19 was a focusing event and that a majority of California cities responded to it by including components of equity into their COVID-era emergency housing policy goals and implementation practices. Our findings include an inventory of California cities' inclusion and emergency housing policies as well as seven insights about equity in emergency housing policies gleaned from the survey data. Further, as outlined in the conclusion of this report, we identify policy goals and practices that, if replicated and sustained, could effectively address long-standing racial, economic, and health disparities. At the same time, we distinguish capacity challenges that may be overcome with training and ongoing practice from those that are likely to persist due to resource constraints. The findings from this research may be especially relevant to affordable housing advocates and policymakers in California as they refine their goals, identify implementation practices, and develop indicators for measuring success, and advance equity in ways that comply with California's 2018 Assembly Bill 686, which mandates public agencies to affirmatively further fair housing.

# California Cities' Emergency Housing Policies during COVID-19: Where is Equity?<sup>1</sup>

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September 6, 2022

## INTRODUCTION: LINKING COVID-19 EMERGENCY HOUSING POLICIES AND EQUITY

COVID-19 emergency housing policies emerged in the early months of spring 2020 as the pandemic shutdown some aspects of social and economic life, and as illness and death began to sweep across the United States (U.S.). In late spring 2020 a wave of racial reckoning was ignited following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and elevated with a large-scale BlackLivesMatter movement that responded with calls for justice. Demands for justice focused on accountability and social equity went beyond policing to include a full range of public policy programs and implementation. At the same time, public awareness about the disproportionate socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 was growing alongside an increasing recognition that those disproportionate impacts reflected the well-established history of racial and economic inequities in the U.S. Those inequities come with a corresponding set of social determinants of health that often consolidate in low-income communities and the people who live and work there - often Black, Indigenous, newly-immigrant, and other communities of color.

Indicators of racial and ethnic inequities in housing have been shown to converge around the areas of housing affordability and displacement as well as housing quality and the availability of clear and community-driven programs for accessing these and other essential services (City of Oakland 2022). Even before the pandemic, Swope and Hernandez (2019) argued that the housing crisis required a broader vision about minimum standards that included health as a consideration in housing adequacy. They noted that housing policies and codes typically focused on economic development and planning without much consideration from a public health perspective. Other recent research has shown that displacement is a public health issue (Mamo & Acosta 2020;

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<sup>1</sup> This project has been made possible in part by a grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative DAF, an advised fund of Silicon Valley Community Foundation to San Francisco State University. This Working Paper is one of three papers funded by this grant and produced by a collaborative and interdisciplinary research team comprised of Dr. Ayse Pamuk (Professor of Urban Studies & Planning), Dr. Jennifer Shea (Professor of Public Administration), Dr. Laura Mamo (Professor of Public Health), Dr. XiaoHang Liu (Professor of Geography & Environment) and Temur Umarov (Graduate Associate at AHRI and a Master of Public Administration candidate).

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AEMP Collective 2021), yet the economic and power relations that shape evictions are long-standing, historical inequities in contrast to a sudden, unexpected event.

It was in this context of disruption and racial reckoning that many cities implemented emergency housing policies, often in conjunction with state and federal programs, to alleviate the public health crisis and mitigate the devastating economic impacts brought on by the pandemic shutdown while preventing widespread displacement and spikes in homelessness. Implementing those emergency housing policies *required* policymakers to be explicit in considering the relationships between housing, economic, and health outcomes. In addition, implementing those emergency housing policies *provided an opportunity* for policymakers to center equity concerns in policy making and program implementation by addressing long-standing racial, economic, health, and other social disparities.

This opportunity arose in the broader socio-economic context, where COVID-19 could be seen as a *focusing event*. Typically, focusing events are sudden shocks, so sudden that they become known to public officials and the public-at-large more-or-less simultaneously (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 1995). The focusing event concept is consistent with a social equity approach to public policy and administration in that it recognizes systemic disadvantages and the power dynamics that create and perpetuate those disadvantages. Focusing events are seen as potential sources of empowerment for historically marginalized groups to reframe persistent policy problems and potential solutions (Birkland 1998). While COVID-19 was sudden shock that caused widespread disruptions, the racial, economic, and health disparities COVID-19 revealed throughout the U.S. was neither sudden nor unforeseeable.

Our research sought to understand whether COVID-19 served as a focusing event that brought equity into the forefront of emergency housing policies and, if so, to understand the ways in which HCD Directors and the cities they work for were concerned with equity in developing or implementing those emergency housing policies. We asked:

1. In what ways, if at all, do emergency housing policies adopted in response to COVID-19 include and conceptualize equity goals?
  - Specifically, do the policy goals and implementation practices reflect a focus on the most impacted and “vulnerable” populations and work in ways that provide clear means of access to resources by residents and communities?
  - In what ways were cities able to respond to immediate needs and implement emergency housing policies?
2. What challenges or successes do HCD Directors identify related to implementing those emergency policies?
  - Specifically, how can we learn from HCD Directors about what is needed to ensure goals and practices that most address those most impacted by and in need of addressing longstanding disparities?
  - What were the opportunities and challenges shaping their response? What were the goals of emergency policies?
3. Finally, in what ways do HCD Directors themselves understand housing policy action as part of an equity strategy or as including approaches to social equity?

We launched the *California Cities' Emergency Housing Policies Survey* to begin to answer these questions.<sup>4</sup> The survey was distributed to Housing and Community Development (HCD) directors (or their equivalent) in all of California's 482 cities and towns. It sought to understand the degree to which emergency policies may have been designed and implemented to address pervasive inequities among California's population and thereby seek to achieve *equity* for California residents. The [survey instrument](https://tinyurl.com/83ppbb26) is available at <https://tinyurl.com/83ppbb26>.

This report presents the survey findings. First, we describe the conceptual framework guiding our survey development and then explain the methodology used to design the survey and to collect and analyze the data. We then present our analysis of the survey results, contextualized in relation to our conceptual framework. Overall, we find that COVID-19 served as a focusing event and that a majority of California cities responded by including components of equity into their COVID-era emergency housing policy goals and implementation practices. This report highlights two sets of related findings. The first set is the inventory of California cities' adoption of inclusionary housing policies, emergency housing policies & participation in equity initiatives. The second set includes seven insights about equity in emergency housing policies gleaned from our analysis of the data. Further, as outlined in the conclusion of this report, we identify policy goals and practices that, if replicated and sustained, could effectively address long-standing racial, economic, and health disparities. At the same time, we distinguish capacity challenges that may be overcome with training and ongoing practice from those that are likely to persist due to resource constraints.

The findings from this research may be especially relevant to affordable housing advocates and policymakers in California as they refine their goals, identify implementation practices, and develop indicators for measuring success in ways that comply with California's 2018 Assembly Bill 686, Santiago. The law mandates public agencies affirmatively further fair housing by taking four sets of actions to advance equity in housing, by addressing gaps between housing needs and access to opportunities, desegregating and integrating residential areas, creating areas of opportunity where Racial and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (R/ECAPs) persist, and adhering to civil rights and fair housing laws (National Housing Law Project 2019; Umarov 2022).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: DIMENSIONS OF EQUITY AND WHY THEY MATTER

This research draws heavily on our prior analysis of housing policies in eight California cities. A primary aim of that study was to examine inclusionary housing (IH) policies to see how, if at all, three dimensions of social equity (economic, racial, and health) were used explicitly or invoked implicitly in policy language (Mamo & Shea 2021). We found that economic equity is most explicit in inclusionary housing policy, but that racial and health equity appear less often in policy language, with racial equity being least present (Mamo & Shea 2021). For example,

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<sup>4</sup> The survey was designed as part of a larger research project with a goal to explore the relationships among racial segregation in cities with and without inclusionary housing policies prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and equity goals.

inclusionary housing policies tend to address things like opportunity creation established by access to housing, and health seeking resources and essential service provision, such as jobs, healthy parks, education, and childcare. Our findings from that work are consistent with those from a 2020 Urban Institute study that reviewed ten policies enacted after Hurricane Katrina and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which found housing policies lack a focus on dimensions of equity (Scally, Champion & Neal 2020, p. v).

**Table 1** summarizes the definitions of each dimension of equity used to guide that analysis; those dimensions and their definitions provide a conceptual framework for how equity may be operationalized in emergency housing policy design or implementation practice.

<b>Table 1: Social Dimensions of Equity and Application in Policy/Practice</b>		
<b>Dimension of Equity</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Examples of Policy/Practices</b>
<b>Economic Equity</b>	An action or goal designed to redistribute capital, resources, or services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income-based target populations (very low, low, and/or moderate)</li> <li>Economic development of geographic area/neighborhood</li> <li>Components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affordability</li> <li>Access to Resources and Jobs</li> <li>Protection of Rights (e.g., tenant rights)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Housing Protection/Stability (e.g., from eviction, harassment, displacement)</li> <li>Rent control, stabilization, and eviction moratoriums.</li> </ul>
<b>Racial Equity</b>	An action or goal designed to counter effects of historic racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not “color-blind” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on eliminating or reducing racism</li> </ul> </li> <li>Targets populations disenfranchised by intersectional social positions, including by race.</li> <li>Includes transparent data on race</li> <li>Focuses on “vulnerable” and systematically excluded or disproportionately disadvantaged communities, noting racial disparities.</li> <li>Aligns with community-based organization and community organization efforts (e.g., Outreach to communities; Community organizing)</li> <li>Working in partnership with CBOs and community organizers to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language and community-centered foci of policy/practice.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Health Equity</b>	An action or goal designed to ensure opportunities for health and well- being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on preventing disease (e.g., COVID-19 physical distancing, vaccination, supplies)</li> <li>Focus on providing opportunities for public health (healthy neighborhoods and environments, access to affordable and appropriate health care services and providers, good housing, and information and resources, among others)</li> <li>Healthy spaces/places/resources for those disproportionately impacted by poor housing, pollution, lack of food, healthcare, and resources; no open spaces, and parks, and sanitation, among others.</li> </ul>

Distinguishing between a focus on “equity” versus a focus on “emergency” is important and particularly relevant for the current study. Emergency policies seeks to address a sudden

shock or event and mitigate immediate negative outcomes, including widespread death, destructions, and other disruptions. Emergency policies may target population groups that have endured longstanding systemic social and economic inequities, but still may not incorporate policies goals or use implementation strategies that recognize the historic and structural drivers of persistent inequities. As a result, emergency policies may be inadequate for addressing the deliberate and embedded ways systemic racism is embedded and embodied in neighborhoods and manifested in health disparities.

Policies developed with a concern for social equity, on the other hand, are rooted in a recognition that social structures, systems, and institutions differentially produce opportunities, protections, challenges, and exclusions for different population groups. An equity approach aims to correct pervasive and unjust policies by making visible intentional actions established to deny opportunity, health, and well-being to some segments of the population and establishing reformed or completely new mechanisms to ensure equitable opportunities. For example, in the United States, Black, Indigenous and people of color communities have been unfairly and systematically excluded from economic development, homeownership, and access to resources as a result of systemic racism embedded in policy and practices, such as historic red-lining and disinvestment in immigrant and Black communities. Equity-based housing policy changes focus on creating systems of opportunity that provide access to financing and/or to safe, adequate, and healthy homes and neighborhoods.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: SURVEY DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION, SAMPLING, AND ANALYTIC APPROACH**

The *California Cities' Emergency Housing Policies Survey* was designed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers at San Francisco State University, including Mamo and Shea. The primary goal was to document which of California's 482 cities and towns adopted emergency housing policies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the degree to which those policies were designed and implemented to address inequities along three dimensions: economic, health, and race/ethnicity. The survey also sought to document challenges or successes cities faced when implementing those emergency policies. After pre-testing and revision,<sup>5</sup> the survey was uploaded into the software program Qualtrics for distribution. In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) on Human Subjects at San Francisco State University and general research principles, participation was voluntary and confidential, but responses were associated with the respondent's city office.

The 30-minute survey primarily utilized Likert-scale closed ended questions with opportunities to explain responses in open-ended "other" sections. Questions were designed to illicit responses that signaled social dimensions of equity (as shown above in **Table 1**), but rarely asked this directly to not overly "lead" the responses. Survey questions were divided into five sections:

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<sup>5</sup> The survey was pre-tested with four HCD Directors and three research colleagues and modified given feedback.



1. Emergency Housing Policy Inventory: Questions about whether cities enacted emergency housing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to present), and whether any had expired or been extended. Respondents were instructed to include state or federal policies implemented locally.
2. Emergency Housing Policy/Program Design & Implementation: Questions about the intended goals, eligibility criteria, and target populations for the emergency housing policies or programs the city implemented. These questions hoped to ascertain whether policies' targeted populations based on income levels, health characteristics, racial identifiers (for which language may serve as a proxy), or neighborhood/community characteristics. To go beyond policy goals/intent/language, the survey asked about practices widely recognized to advance equity, such as partnering with community-based organizations, translating materials, and providing application assistance. Questions in this section also asked about successes and challenges cities faced in implementing policies, as well as strategies they used to overcome any challenges.
3. Emergency Housing Policy/Program Outcomes and Next Steps: Questions about whether the emergency housing policies/programs were perceived to be successful in achieving their goals and the likelihood of those policies being extended or elements adopted into more permanent affordable or inclusionary housing policies.
4. Emergency Housing Policy/Program Funding & Partnerships: Questions asking about the funding sources and partnerships the city's HCD (or equivalent) department engaged in when implementing emergency housing policies/programs.
5. Pre-pandemic Inclusionary Housing Policies/Programs: Questions which, if any, inclusionary housing policies or programs cities had in place and when they were first adopted.

A Qualtrics link was sent to all 482 HCD Director Offices in California cities on March 14, 2022<sup>6</sup> remaining open for respondent completion until May 15, 2022. Reminders were sent weekly.

### Response Rate and City Participation

The overall survey response rate was 28% (133 cities).<sup>7</sup> We sent the survey primarily to HCD director offices, allowing appropriate staff to complete the survey.<sup>8</sup> As a result, there were instances where more than one person (often another person from the same agency) completed the survey or a part of the survey while another respondent completed the questions in which

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<sup>6</sup> To gather data from Housing and Community Development Directors in all of California's cities (N=482), we created an up-to-date contact list of Housing and Community Development Directors relying in part on Grounded Solutions data obtained in their 2019 California survey. We supplemented and cross-checked this with contact lists created by the California Department of Planning and Research ([Directory of Planning Agencies, January 2021](#)), California Rural Housing Coalition (2018/2019), Urban Displacement Project ADU survey in 2020, and through web-based research and contacting cities directly by phone.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the sampling method, the number of people invited to take the survey is likely more than 482 and while we do not know how much larger, we suspect it is just a handful.

<sup>8</sup> One hundred four respondents provided their job title. A plurality (35%) were HCD Directors while just over 10% were either Housing Managers or Administrators or Senior/Principal Planners.

their expertise was most aligned, so we combined them. In those cases, we examined the responses from cities with more than one respondent and conducted a same/different analysis on their answers. For most questions, only one respondent per city provided an answer.<sup>9</sup> After this process, two cities were excluded from the analysis because they did not answer sufficient questions, leaving 131 responses (27% response rate) to include in our analysis.

Response rate is one indicator of survey data quality, but more important is how representative of the overall population (all cities in California in this case) survey respondents are (Dillman, Smyth & Christian 2014). Koch and Blohm (2016, p.2) remind us that “nonresponse bias may be low even when the response rate is low – namely, when nonresponse is predominantly random” and that nonresponse bias ought to be considered a variable-specific factor. To get a sense of the degree to which our survey results may be affected by nonresponse bias, we calculate the response rates by population size and by region and compare those to the proportion in the population overall to get the nonresponse rate for each (**Tables 2 & 3**).

**Table 2** shows that small cities are under-represented in our sample, so that cities with a population between 10,000 and 49,999 most under-represented (30% nonresponse rate) while the nonresponse rate for California’s smallest cities is 19%. Larger cities – those with a population over 250,000 or more - are well-represented in our sample, mirroring their proportion in the state overall. The under-representation of small cities is not surprising given the well-known capacity constraints they face. However, it poses a limitation for this study and the generalizability of findings to smaller cities. In this report, we do not report findings by a city’s population size.

<b>Population (2019)</b>	<b>Cities by Population Size as a % of All Cities in CA</b>	<b>Response Rate (Responses by Population Size as a % of all Cities in CA)</b>	<b>Nonresponse Rate by Population Size</b>
More than 1 million	1%	1%	0%
500,000 to 1 million	1%	1%	0%
250,000 to 499,999	2%	1%	1%
100,000 to 249,999	12%	4%	8%
50,000 to 99,999	22%	6%	15%
10,000 to 49,999	41%	11%	30%
Less than 10,000	22%	4%	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>27%</b>	

**Table 3** shows that the highest nonresponse rates are from the Central Valley and Los Angeles County (15% each), followed by the San Francisco Bay Area and (Other). Central Coast, Inland Empire, and Orange and San Diego Counties all had nonresponse rates less than 10%. In other words, our survey results are fairly well representative of regions throughout

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<sup>9</sup> We found that respondents from only two cities (Lodi and Concord) provided different responses to more than half of the survey questions. Looking by survey question, we found just four questions for which 50% or more of the remaining 8 cities have different responses.

California, but caution must be taken in generalizing results by region. For that reason, in this report, we do not report results by region.

<b>Table 3: Survey Responses by Region (n=131)</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Cities in Region as a % of All Cities in CA</b>	<b>Response Rate (Responses in Region as a % of all Cities in CA)</b>	<b>Nonresponse Rate by Region</b>
<b>Central Coast</b>	6%	2%	4%
<b>Central Valley</b>	20%	5%	15%
<b>Inland Empire</b>	11%	3%	8%
<b>Los Angeles County</b>	18%	4%	15%
<b>Orange and San Diego Counties</b>	11%	2%	9%
<b>San Francisco Bay Area</b>	21%	9%	12%
<b>Other</b>	13%	2%	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>27%</b>	

### Analytic Approach

A descriptive analysis of the survey findings relied on frequencies and counts generated by Qualtrics and using Excel. We reviewed the responses to the open-ended questions and categorized them with a goal of capturing the pattern of the perspectives of respondents. Prior to conducting the analysis, the data cleaning involved removing blank entries from the spreadsheet that totaled to 48 potential respondents who opened the survey but did not answer any questions. Additionally, answers for “select all that apply” questions were separated into individual columns with the creation of dichotomous variables for each entry. Responses to the Likert Scale questions were checked and edited for consistency among the coding of responses (e.g., coding “a great deal” as 4 for similar questions). Lastly, manual inspection was conducted to insure the “select all that apply” questions were accurately recorded in the newly created columns.

With a clean dataset and driven by our objective to understand the conceptualization of equity in the goals and implementation of emergency housing policies, we structured our analysis descriptively. We analyzed the survey data to illuminate how and to what extent cities incorporate underlying concepts and components of equity into their COVID-19 emergency housing policies and implementation practices.

## **FINDINGS: CALIFORNIA CITIES’ COMMITMENT TO EQUITY**

A set of key findings show the COVID-19 pandemic served as a focusing event that opened space for equity to be incorporated into emergency housing policies and their implementation. Our analysis revealed equity-based goals and practices reflected in how HCD staff respond to questions about the target populations of various policies, implementation practices, and perceived successes and challenges. Indeed, while only one-third of HCD Directors report their cities participate in “equity-based programs or initiatives,” we show that

the majority of cities incorporated some strategies widely recognized in the literature (and measured in this California Cities survey) as consistent with advancing equity.

A majority of California cities implemented emergency housing policies and perceived their design and implementation to have been successful in achieving their goals. Many of these emergency housing policies included indicators of equity, even as they faced capacity challenges that impacted the effectiveness of emergency housing policy/program implementation. The equity indicators we analyze include how target populations are identified and reached. This consists of economic status, geographic or neighborhood characteristics, or by race, ethnicity, or language spoken. We also analyzed whether/how cities partner with community-based organizations or use community-engaged strategies to implement policy/practices. In this paper, we first present the inventory we compiled from the survey results. Second, we present a set of findings that includes seven insights about equity in emergency housing policies gleaned from our analysis of the data.

In this report, we do not analyze relationships among variables that represent characteristics of the cities that responded to our survey (i.e., whether cities with IH policies are more likely to adopt emergency policies or whether cities that adopt emergency housing policies also participate in equity initiatives).

## Taking Inventory

### *California Cities' Commitment to Inclusionary Housing*

California is a state with a commitment to inclusionary housing, as documented by prior research on IH policies nationwide (Grounded Solutions 2020). Our survey results confirm that cities in California have a long commitment to inclusionary housing policies. Forty-three cities report having IH policies in place as early as 1976<sup>10</sup> when Los Gatos in Northern California adopted IH. The major growth of IH policies started in the 2000s.

**Figure 1** on the following page shows the types of IH policies in place, including whether the policies are mandatory or voluntary. Providing on-site below market rate housing units is most common overall, followed closely by paying in-lieu fees to the city. Those programs are far more frequently designated as mandatory than providing off-site below market rate housing units or land donation to the city. Approximately the same number of HCD Directors indicated that providing below market rate (BMR) housing units, whether on-site or off-site, is voluntary.

### *Inventory of COVID-Era Emergency Housing Policies*

A key indicator of equity in public policy is enacting policies aimed to help those most “vulnerable” to economic, health, and social burdens, such as adverse health impacts and homelessness. Whether or not a city enacted emergency housing policies reflects the commitments to addressing potential harms to its residents when a crisis such as the COVID-19

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<sup>10</sup> Not all cities with inclusionary housing policies responded to our survey. The Grounded Solutions (2020) database is more complete.

pandemic arises. In our survey, we found that two-thirds of cities enacted emergency housing policies either as a direct response to the pandemic when millions of people lost their jobs and were at-risk of homelessness and displacement from their residences, or as a response to the ongoing housing crisis (re-prioritized during the pandemic). Of those that enacted emergency housing policies or programs, 46% reported enacting 1-3 and only 2% enacted 10 or more. When data was collected in spring 2022, more than one-quarter (28%) of respondents said none of those policies/programs had expired (**Tables 4 & 5**).

**Figure 1: Types of IH Policies in Place (n=102)**

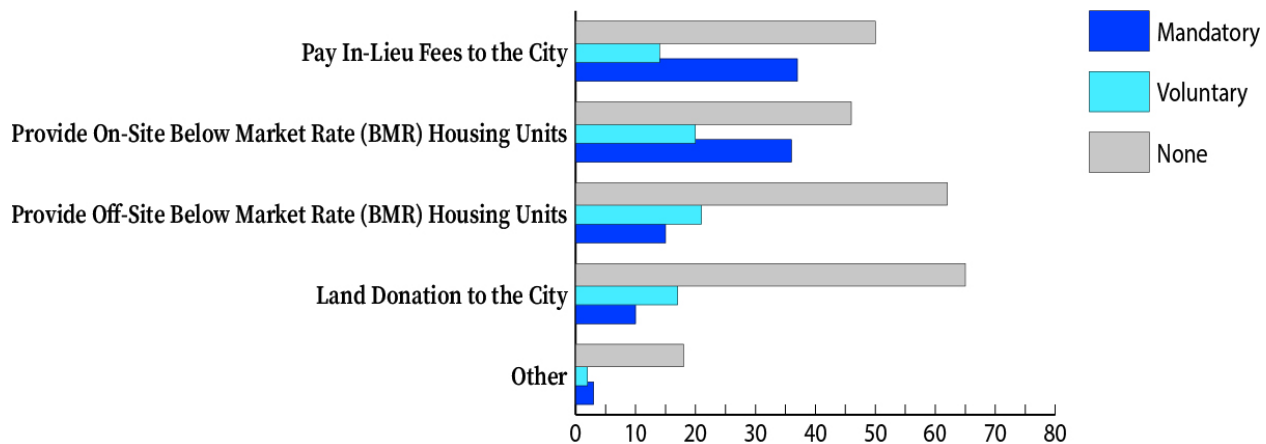


Table 4: Number of Emergency Housing Policies/Programs Enacted (n=131)		
	Percent	Count
1 to 3	46%	60
4 to 6	17%	22
7 to 9	5%	6
10 or more	2%	2
None	31%	41

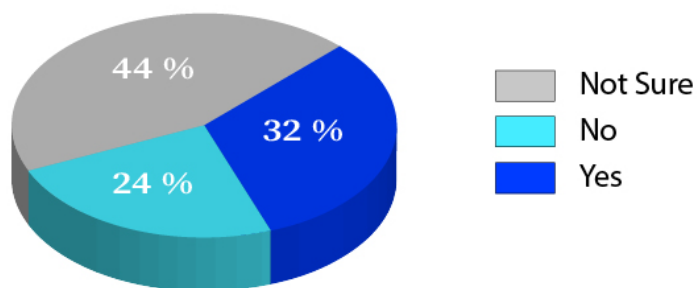
Table 5: Number of Emergency Housing Policies/Programs Expired (n=86)		
	Percent	Count
All of them	13%	11
Most of them	20%	17
About half of them	10%	9
Some of them	29%	25
None of them	28%	24

## *Cities' Participation in Equity-Based Programs or Initiatives*

Cities that demonstrate a broad commitment to equity may participate in programs or initiatives that provide training to staff about how to incorporate equity principles into a range of managerial and policymaking practices. Participating in these types of programs would likely bring equity concerns to the forefront of policymaking and implementation. That participation may be accompanied by funding and other resources intended to advance equity goals. Translating outreach and application materials, working with trusted community organizations to promote programs/policies, reducing barriers to program participation, and providing applicants assistance are a few examples of how cities may dedicate resources to advance equity in emergency housing policies. The survey asks specifically about those and other activities.

To get a sense of cities' commitment to equity overall, the survey asked about their participation in equity-based programs or initiatives. Almost one-third (32%) of respondents indicated that their city participated in an equity-based program or initiative while almost a quarter (24%) said they did not and nearly half (44%) were unsure (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2: Cities Engaged in Equity-Based Programs or Initiatives (n=82)**



While offices, task forces, committees, and programs exist in many of these cities, much of this work is new and has not been widely integrated into city policies, programs, and practices. When asked which areas are the focus of their city's engagement in equity-based programs or initiatives, HCD Directors pointed to mostly newly established programs with racial equity and/or environmental equity lenses. Larger cities (e.g., Oakland, SF, San Jose, and Fresno) pointed to specific policies that were highly developed and integrated in city programs, policies, and practices. For example, in response to this question the city of Sacramento identified their *Race, Gender, Equity Action Plan* for employment recruitment/retention of city employees. The respondent said:

There is an effort to develop metrics for policy analysis for equity impacts for all city policies. The General Plan's Environmental Justice Element is going beyond minimum requirements to include equitable land use and development policies. The economic development office is focused on inclusive economic development. The Neighborhood Development Action Team focuses on

inclusive neighborhood planning and economic development in disadvantaged commercial corridors and adjacent neighborhoods.

### Key Findings: Insights About Equity in Emergency Housing Policies

The survey results enabled us to identify the following seven insights about equity in emergency housing policies, each of which we explain in turn.

1. Emergency housing policies reflect some concern for equity
2. Most COVID-19 era emergency housing policies achieved goals
3. Target populations of COVID-19 era emergency housing policies reflect equity concerns
4. Implementing equity through community partnerships
5. Implementing with a focus on target populations
6. Capacity challenges impact the emergency housing policy/program implementation
7. COVID-19 era emergency housing policies may impact the future of equity in housing policy

#### *Emergency Housing Policies Reflect Some Concern for Equity*

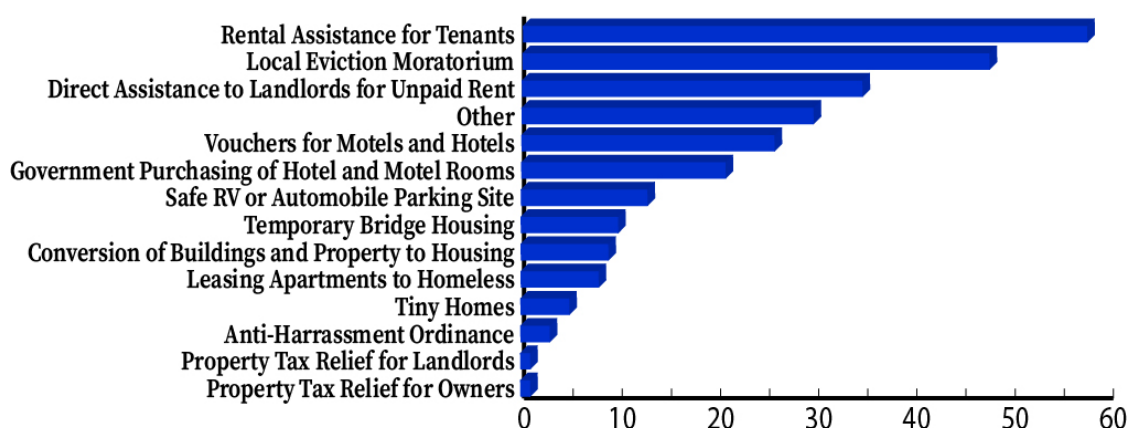
It is not only the enactment of an emergency housing policy, or set of policies, that matters, but also the specific types of policies that indicate whether and how principles of equity are included. The specific types of emergency housing policies enacted as reported by survey respondents are described in **Figure 3**. Importantly, the two most frequent type of emergency housing programs were those that protected tenants from displacement. These are rental assistance programs for tenants (58 respondents) and local eviction moratorium policies (48 respondents). Together these focus on protecting those who might be most vulnerable to both the economic fall-out of the pandemic, given massive unemployment of service sector workers, and those who may be most at-risk of transmission given occupational sector work as front-line or “essential” workers. Protecting the most vulnerable in times of crisis, in this case by preventing homelessness and displacement as well as ensuring a home to quarantine for oneself and family, indicates attention to principles of equity. This includes racial, social, and economic equity given the implicit attention to the well-known economic burden of rising rents due to the gentrification that disproportionality impacts Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as immigrant, lower-income earners, and the oldest and disabled residents. Many residents in neighborhoods undergoing gentrification from lower and middle-income to higher-income earning households, as well as our lowest-income neighborhoods were most at-risk of displacement due to the intersectional impact of COVID-19, including wage reductions, unemployment, as well as higher risk to exposure.

In addition to emergency response for tenants, emergency housing programs were also designed to alleviate hardships for property owners with direct assistance to landlords for unpaid rent (35 respondents). These programs targeted owners with the dual purpose of protecting them

from lost revenue and protecting tenants from displacement due to owner needs to re-secure these revenues with new tenants who can pay.

Finally, we found that housing policies included explicit attention to homeless services and prevention in the form of vouchers for hotels and motels (26 respondents) and programs to support government purchasing of hotel and motel rooms (21 respondents). Homelessness prevention using systemic and institutional change is understood here as an indicator of equity given its approach as well as focus on the most vulnerable (economic, health, and those without stable and adequate housing).

**Figure 3: Types of Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=69)**



Interestingly, 30 respondents indicating their jurisdiction had implemented an emergency housing policy/program that was not one of the answer options provided. Respondents described a large number of policies/programs that were filling gaps in the availability of essential services and resource needs, such as legal assistance, access to sanitation services, and food and financial assistance (see **Table 6**). The responses were not always distinct from those reported in **Figure 1** of this report (e.g., many reflect the same goals of homelessness and displacement prevention), yet these also document the important efforts to fill-in resource needs and opportunities. Indeed, HCD Directors understood emergency policies around legal assistance as well as meals and utility payment supports among others as housing policies. This reflects commitments to addressing equity as including the uneven resource allocation in our communities. However, while these policies reflect a concern for equity and intend to mitigate worsening the plight of the most vulnerable – who often have experienced the negative impacts of systemic inequities over time – their focus is on the emergency scenario, not on promoting social change to rectify inequities in the longer-term.

To understand if and how principles of equity shape policy action, we also asked about the time frame of the policy goals— asking respondents to reflect on the more immediate and longer-term goals for their emergency housing policies/program. “Immediate-term” refers to a year or less and longer-term to a year or more while “longer-term” goals would go beyond the immediate crisis response, providing insight on differentiations between “emergency” action and “equity” action for long-term change. Some emergency policy goals focus on mitigating



potential fallout, thereby serving a protective role; others jump in to where the need is also great. For example, Project Roomkey differentiates between a focus on the already homeless and those at risk (see Pamuk & Umarov 2022).

**Table 6: List of “Other” Types of Emergency Housing**

**Legal assistance and legal-related resources**

- Legal and crisis stabilization services for tenants impacted by pandemic
- Legal assistance for tenants
- Extension of entitlement timelines
- Virtual Brown Act meetings
- Online permitting programs

**Sanitary facilities and related services**

- Restrooms and handwashing stations at encampments
- Expansion of existing shower and laundry programs
- Services on-site for homeless people (handwashing & portable toilets, isolation/quarantine programs)

**Alternative housing units and development support**

- Accessory dwelling unit (ADU) ordinances and updates
- Urban lot split ordinances
- Incentives for owners to rent second homes to local residents

**Homeless prevention/eviction protections**

- Just cause eviction ordinances
- Eviction prevention programs
- Rent control ordinances
- Rent freezes

**Homeless services**

- Community Development Block Grant CARES Act (CDBG-CV) programs helping unhoused Project Roomkey guests locate permanent housing and obtain vital documents
- CDBG and CDBG-CV pass-through funding provided to local non-profit organizations for preparing, preventing, or responding to the pandemic, including provision of assistance to low-moderate income persons.

**Assistance to local businesses and/or nonprofit organizations**

- Several rounds of monetary assistance for local businesses
- Business grant programs
- Childcare microbusiness assistance
- Financial assistance to transitional housing shelters
- Funding for food programs
- Small business assistance programs

**Emergency housing/shelter**

- Emergency housing vouchers
- Expanded emergency shelter regulations for temporary sheltering
- Bed capacity increase at homeless shelters
- Pallet shelters

**Programs for needed direct resources**

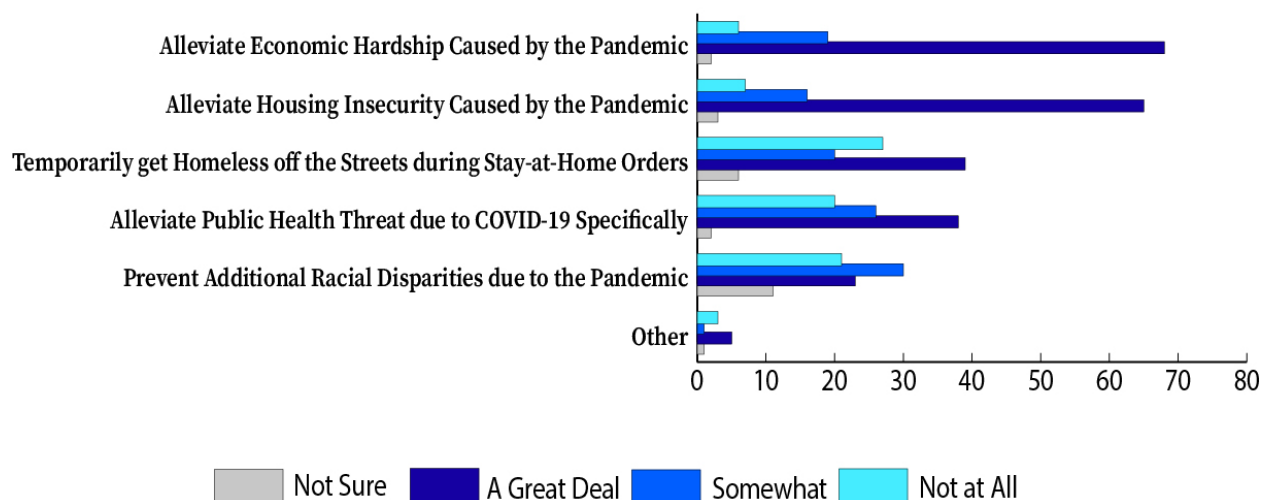
- Food assistance
- Financial assistance
- Utility assistance
- Home delivered meals programs for the critically ill
- Mortgage assistance to low-income homeowners
- Rent repayment plans

**Other housing affordability**

- Housing assistance funds for income-qualifying residents
- Permanent housing funding sources
- State and local funding investments to increase affordable housing

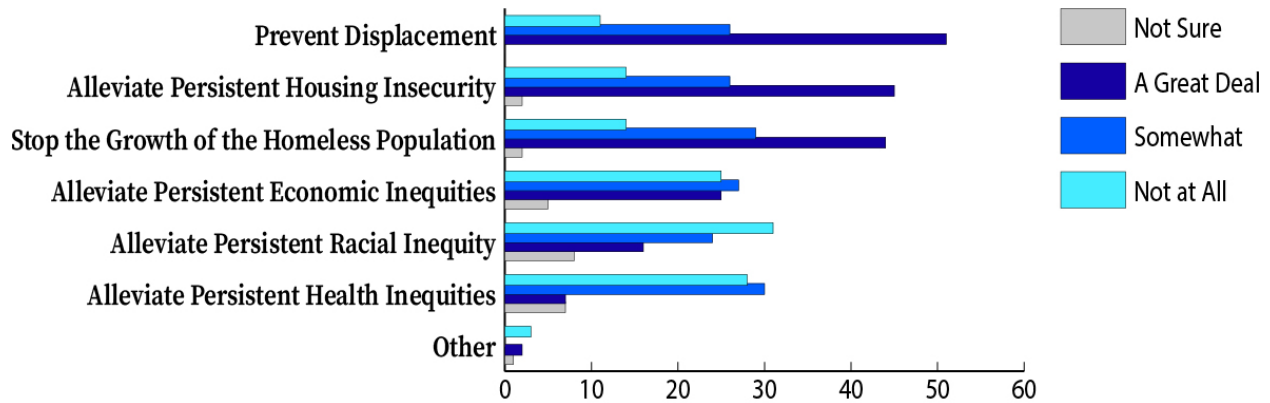
Two primary, immediate goals of emergency housing policies most frequently identified by HCD directors were alleviating economic hardship caused by the pandemic (68 said ‘a great deal’ and 19 ‘somewhat’) and alleviating housing insecurity caused by the pandemic (65 said ‘a great deal’ and 16 ‘somewhat’). Those were followed by getting homeless off the streets during the stay-at-home orders and alleviating the public health threat due to COVID-19. The importance of the goal of preventing racial disparities trailed substantially, being identified as mattering a great deal by only 23 respondents, though 30 said it mattered somewhat. Twenty-one respondents said preventing racial disparities was ‘not at all’ an immediate policy goal (**Figure 4**). Given equity’s social change orientation and concern with undoing structural, systemic, and institutional wrongs, it is not surprising that emergency housing policy goals would not have an immediate social change orientation.

**Figure 4: Immediate-term Goals for Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=95)**



Similarly, according to most HCD directors alleviating persistent inequities – whether, economic, racial, or health - were not primary long-term policy goals. When asked about the longer-term goals of the emergency response, the three most common goals identified for emergency housing policies/programs were about housing stability: to prevent displacement, to alleviate persistent housing insecurity, and to stop the growth of the homeless population. Explicitly alleviating inequities along racial, health, or economic lines were least commonly identified as primary longer-term goals, with 30 respondents indicating that alleviating persistent health inequities was “not at all” a long-term goal, 27 indicating the same for alleviating persistent economic inequities, and 24 for alleviating persistent racial inequity. Still these inequities were more frequently identified as “somewhat” mattering as long-term policy goals as were the other response options (**Figure 5**).

**Figure 5: Longer-term Goals for Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=89)**



While alleviating persistent inequities were not primary long-term policy goals for many cities, most recognized at least one dimension of equity as factoring into those long-term goals to some degree. This finding brings to mind a question that merits empirical examination in a future study: will emergency housing policies that have some concern for equity goals lay the groundwork for more explicit equity goals to be embedded in permanent housing policies?

#### *Most COVID-19 Era Emergency Housing Policies Achieved Goals*

We asked respondents to think about the goals for the emergency housing policies/programs implemented by their office since March 2020 and to indicate about how many of those goals had been achieved. More than half said most (28%) or all (27%) of the policy goals had been achieved while only 5% said none (Table 7).

<b>Table 7: Number of Cities Reporting Emergency Housing Policy Goals Achieved (n=88)</b>		
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
All of them	27%	24
Most of them	28%	25
About half of them	9%	8
Some of them	19%	17
None of them	5%	4
Not sure	11%	10

HCD Directors were emphatic about the successes they had in achieving their emergency housing policy goals. Responses included innovative, structural change that cities see as having the potential for sustainability. We found that HCD directors held immense pride and excitement for the vast effort and success of the emergency response. What especially emerged was the impact on potential displacements. Cities sought to prevent evictions through the eviction moratoriums at the federal, state, and city-levels but also in their approaches to marshal resources where they were needed most. For example, many highlighted the attention to health and safety

of the homeless populations as a significant goal achievement citing well-known programs such as Roomkey, Homekey, as well as the establishment of RV parking, and other programs providing resource support such as sanitation and meals.

Other achievements include protecting tenants and owners, supporting businesses, and shielding low-income and unhoused residents. More specifically, cities supported tenants with financial assistance and emergency moratoriums, moved unhoused residents into motels and hotels, provided food assistance, and completely revamped assistance systems by moving more online and developing new partnerships with other city agencies and community-based organizations. The examples HCD directors gave are multi-faceted in terms of structural and programmatic change given various levels of focus (on individuals, organizations, or programs). Fifty-seven respondents cited specific numbers of households, organizations, and programs benefiting from these emergency housing policies. One example from the city of San Jose demonstrates the multi-pronged approach mobilized for homeless response:

Our coordinated response with the County to bring forward a comprehensive response to addressing the needs of our unhoused residents - we opened temp shelters, interim housing, expanded outreach, implemented a new program called SOAR that targeted our 20 largest encampments in San Jose, provided on-site trash pick-up, portable toilets and hand washing stations, funded an isolation and quarantine contract implemented by the County for housed and unhoused people who had COVID-19 or were exposed and needed a safe place to stay.

This long list of services for the unhoused was combined with others focused on preventing displacement and providing health care. As one HCD employee stated, “funding and services were also provided for people who have a home and a safe place to isolate to encourage them to isolate.” According to a Santa Clara HCD employee, “[We] didn't have a major outbreak within our shelters or homeless community. More importantly, we were able to transition people into permanent housing.” These responses reveal attention to the social drivers of inequality in the ways emergency housing efforts focused on prevention of displacement and a concern for health impacts for those already unhoused.

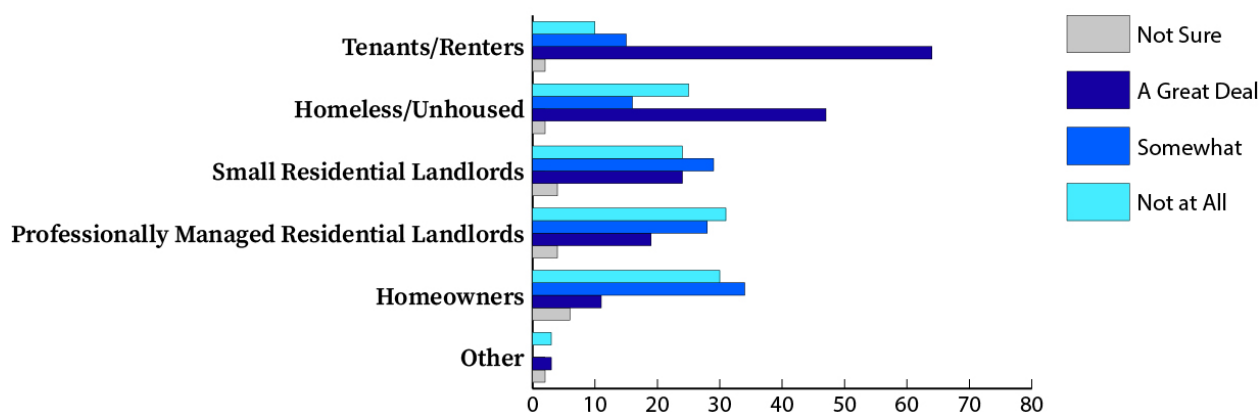
While “success” was often identified, many respondents also reported that a significant number of goals remain unmet (34 responses) as cities struggled to find the resources (land, cites, motels, and resources) and lacked the capacity to implement these policies. This was especially evident regarding homelessness relief and service provision in the time of a health crisis. In addition, getting resources to renters in need to remain housed is challenging and funds remain limited. As a San Francisco respondent stated, “deploying rental assistance in a timely way before the 3/31/22 expiration of the eviction moratorium was difficult. Cities struggle to meet the demand for outreach to those who need it.” Finally, most HCD staff members also indicated that affordable housing development continues to be an issue in the state of California, underscoring a focus on preventing further housing instability and displacement among California residents.

## *Target Populations of COVID-19 Era Emergency Housing Policies Reflect Equity Concerns*

A focus of the survey was to understand how emergency housing policy and HCD directors understood the residents most in need of intervention. The survey asked HCD directors to describe the target populations of their emergency housing efforts (see **Figures 6– 9**). Target populations refer to the intended beneficiaries of public policies and may be identified by a range of demographic criteria such as (but not limited to) age, gender, income, health status, or education. Sometimes policies are written or implemented so that target population characteristics overlap with eligibility criteria that determine who can receive governmental assistance. Understanding whether policies target specific populations and, if so, the practices city agencies use to implement those policies is one approach to understanding whether and how principles of equity are part of emergency housing policies.

In responses to the questions about target populations, we first found a clear majority of respondents (64) who indicated that tenants/renters were a target population for emergency housing policies/programs, followed by the homeless/unhoused population (47). Homeowners and landlords were less commonly identified (**Figure 6**).

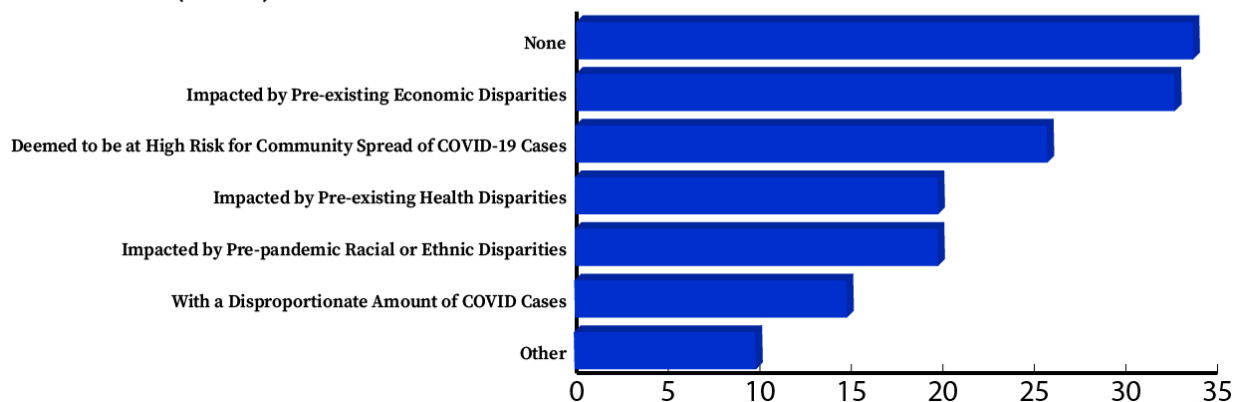
**Figure 6: Target Populations for Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=91)**



We asked HCD directors specifically about the geographic and place-based characteristics of their target populations in the design or implementation of emergency housing policies/programs. Neighborhood and community are understood as central to addressing drivers of inequity that have long been shown to cluster in place-based areas shaped by prior policies such as red-lining and disinvestment. Our findings are mixed here, with some evidence of concern for economic and health equity in place (**Figure 7**). For example, while 34 HCD directors indicated their cities used no geographic targets in policy design or implementation (meaning that no community characteristics were used to target policy implementation), 33 indicated targeting communities impacted by pre-existing economic disparities was the most common response. In addition, 28 HCD directors indicated their cities targeted communities at high risk for community spread of COVID-19 (26), certainly indicating a concern for equity, even if only in the context of the pandemic. Further, targeting communities impacted by pre-

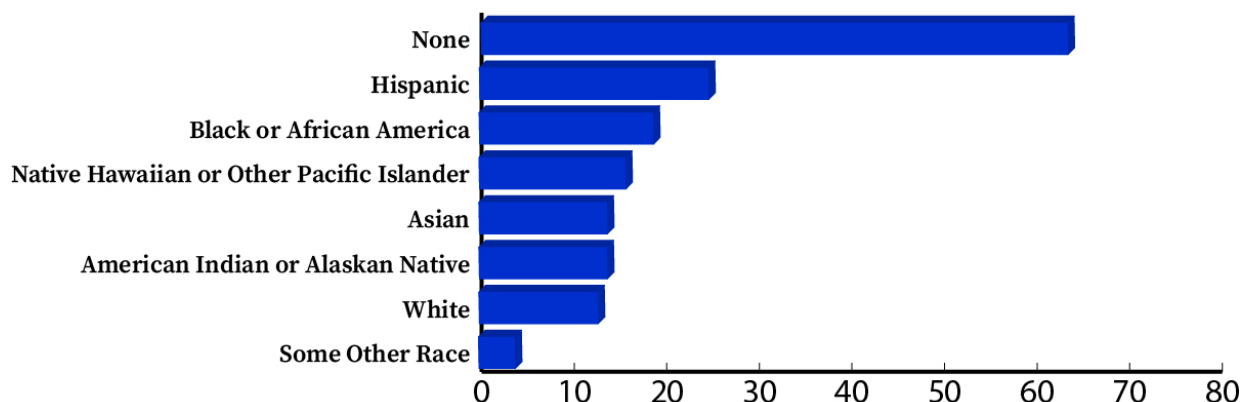
existing health disparities was identified by as many HCD directors (20) as targeting communities impacted by pre-pandemic racial or ethnic disparities (20) (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Geographic Characteristics Targeted in the Design or Implementation of Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=87)**



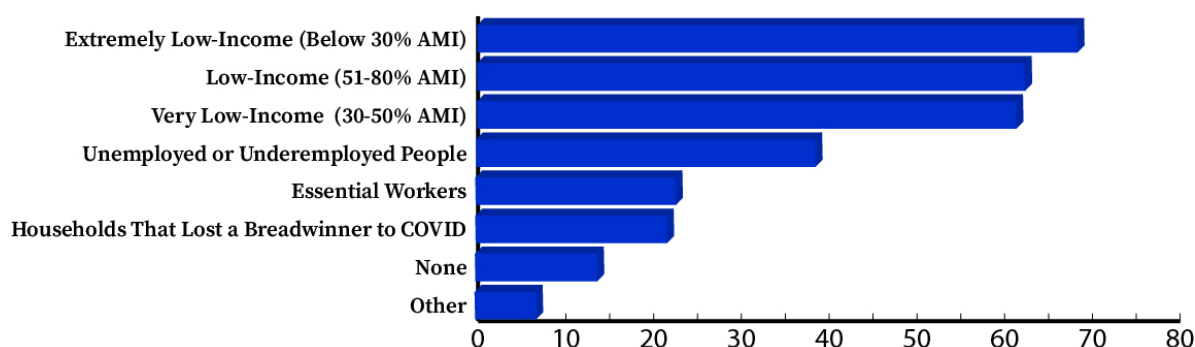
A clear majority of respondents indicated that their jurisdictions did not use any racial or ethnic identifiers in the design or implementation of emergency housing policies/programs (64 respondents). Of the few that responded “some other race”, one specified Vietnamese, while the others indicated all races. Groups targeted most frequently were Hispanic (25), Black or African American (19), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (16). All other groups were targeted by fewer than 15 respondents (**Figure 8**). This is not surprising given “color blind” restrictions on racial/ethnic targeting in various policy domains in U.S. policy (Ong & Ong 2021).

**Figure 8: Racial or Ethnic Identifiers Targeted in Design or Implementation of Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=89)**



As shown in **Figure 9**, in terms of income targeting in programs, most emergency housing policies/programs targeted extremely low income (69), low income (63), and/or very low income (62) residents. Essential workers and households that lost a breadwinner to COVID-19 were much less frequently targeted (23 and 22 respondents, respectively). This indicates a continued emphasis on longstanding economic inequities by income, not just a focus on the immediate economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 9: Income Level or Employment Status Targeted in the Design or Implementation of Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=69)**



Paying attention to target populations sheds light on whether and to what degree concerns for pervasive and longstanding inequities are part of cities' emergency housing policies. The predominant focus on very low-income and low-income residents over essential workers or households that lost a breadwinner due to COVID-19 reveals that these emergency housing policies acknowledged long-standing economic inequities and the pervasive need to ameliorate them. This may be because cities use income-based targeting in their local IH programs and have systems in place to verify income etc. Nonprofit housing developers also routinely apply to state and federal housing subsidy programs that require targeting beneficiaries based on income. Nonprofit service delivery organizations may be using more relaxed eligibility criteria depending on the source of their funding (e.g., private donations to serve refugees). Further, the provision of some ethnocultural and racial targeting is noteworthy as the U.S. moves away from "color blind" and racist policies.

### *Implementing Equity through Community Partnerships*

The presence of community-based strategies is important for thinking about principles of equity that account for community differences in access to resources and protections from economic, social, and health vulnerabilities/impacts. Many emergency housing policies/programs were enacted in partnership with other organizations (most frequently community-based or nonprofit organizations or other city agencies/offices) and funded by the government, whether federal, state, and/or local. Some partnership approaches may advance equity by enhancing trust, using inclusive practices, and promoting cultural competence. As shown in **Figure 10**, cities most frequently partnered with community-based or nonprofit organizations to implement emergency housing policies/programs (62 respondents) and city

agencies/offices (42). Philanthropic organizations were least frequently identified (7). Further, when asked what kinds of partnerships were formed for implementation, more than 50 HCD directors indicated partnering with public and non-profit organizations. We understand this move as a significant shift toward equity as housing policy practitioners align with community organizations.

**Figure 10: Types of Organizations Cities Partnered with to Implement Emergency Housing Policies/Programs**



#### *Implementing with a focus on Target Population*

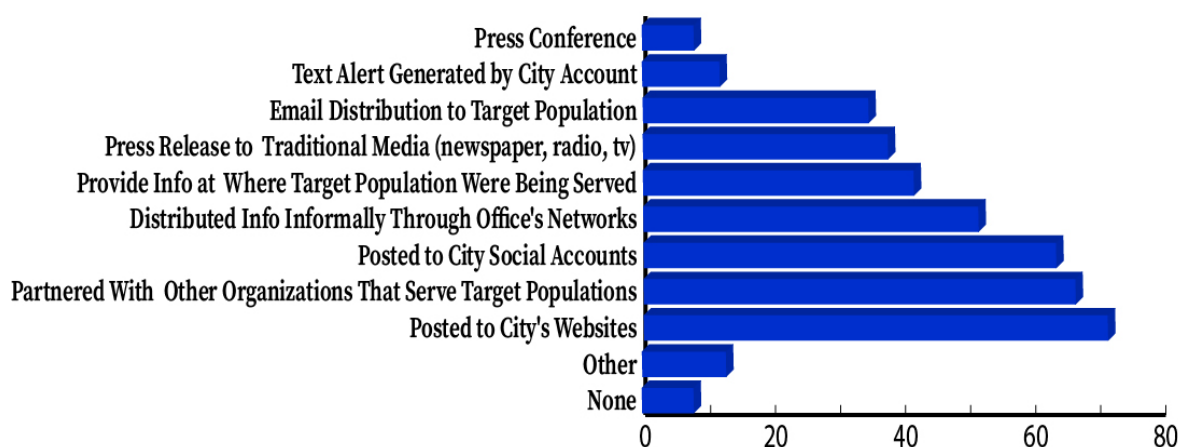
Providing members of target populations with information about policies/programs, they may be eligible for, including eligibility criteria, application processes, timelines, and expected benefits is widely recognized as a policy implementation strategy that advances equity goals and outcomes. Providing application assistance is recognized as a way to overcome application barriers related to distrust in government, limited English language literacy, limited computer literacy, and limited time and other resources to learn about eligibility and application requirements on one's own. Partnering with trusted organizations in the community is known as an important component of an equity-based strategy given the alignment with community-knowledge and longstanding engagements in place. This is a strategy used to help governments reach target populations, because those organizations have cultural competence, language skills, and relationships that may be lacking in government agencies. To understand the degree to which they were taking proactive steps to make emergency housing programs accessible to the target populations identified, we asked a series of questions about how cities implemented those policies, focusing on: communications mechanisms cities used to reach target populations, whether they translated informational and application materials into languages other than English, whether they provided application assistance to eligible populations, and the types of organizations they partnered with to implement emergency housing policies.

Engaging in targeted communications strategies are also part of a recognized equity-minded focus to ensure accessibility to communities with limited English proficiency, limited literacy skills, or limited time. The survey asked about the communications mechanisms cities



used to reach their target audiences. Three of the four most common answers are not consistent with equity practices but rely on “communications as usual” strategies that are most likely to reach people with high levels of information literacy and trust in government (posting to city websites (72), posting to city social media accounts (64), and distributing information informally through office networks (52; **Figure 11**). Despite most cities’ reliance on those “communications as usual” mechanisms, many also indicate communicating in ways recognized to advance equity (partnering with organizations that serve the target populations (67), providing information at sites where target populations receive services (42), and distributing emails directly to target populations (35).

**Figure 11: Communications Mechanisms Used to Reach Target Populations (n=90)**



The survey asked which limited English-speaking households were targeted in the design and/or implementation of cities’ emergency housing policies/programs and then whether cities translated policy information and application materials into any of those languages. Again, many cities targeted dual-language, limited English-speaking households with approximately one-third of the cities indicating they translated all the informational and application materials about emergency housing policies/programs into a language other than English, while 38% noted that only some of the material had been translated (**Table 8**). Engaging in this sort of targeted translation work is a recognized approach to ensure opportunity for those often marginalized and excluded from services. By far, the language materials were most frequently translated into was Spanish (63) indicating efforts to ensure racial/ethnic equity for Latinx communities. Chinese was a far distant second (10) language translation, followed by Vietnamese and Tagalog (6 each), indicating some recognition of equity needs for our Asian-American and Pacific Islander communities. One or two cities indicated translating materials into Punjabi, Hmong, Khmer, Korean, or Russian.

<b>Table 8: Number of Cities that had Information Translated into a Language Other than English (n=88)</b>		
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Yes, all of the informational and application materials were translated	33%	29
Sometimes, some of the informational or application materials were translated	38%	33
No, none of the materials were translated	11%	10
Not sure	18%	16

Seventy-six percent of respondents (n=95) indicated that their city provided application support to help eligible populations take up emergency housing assistance while 11% did not and 14% were unsure. HCD departments supported and collaborated with nonprofits and/or created new programs to conduct outreach and assist the residents in navigating services for emergency housing programs as well as for resource allocation. This included information and outreach, direct support, case management, and assistance accessing services. They did so by making staff and services available and building partnerships with community-based or other nonprofit organizations. There appears to have been an incredible amount of hiring and infrastructure development (computer and online systems) that were needed to implement these supports.

One example of new programs comes from San Jose. The city opened two emergency eviction centers, which provided help with rental assistance applications, legal counseling and services, follow-up with renters and landlords on three-day notices notifying them about rental assistance and addressing an unlawful detainer as well as collaboration with courts during the eviction process. Another example comes from the City of Santa Ana, which provided outreach and education via tabling and flyer distribution at city events, making phone calls, conducting in-person and virtual workshops, partnering with the local food bank, and engaging in a range of communications activities (e.g., traditional radio and news media, social media, and other online communications). The city also directly assisted with applications for emergency rental assistance at computer labs available for residents.

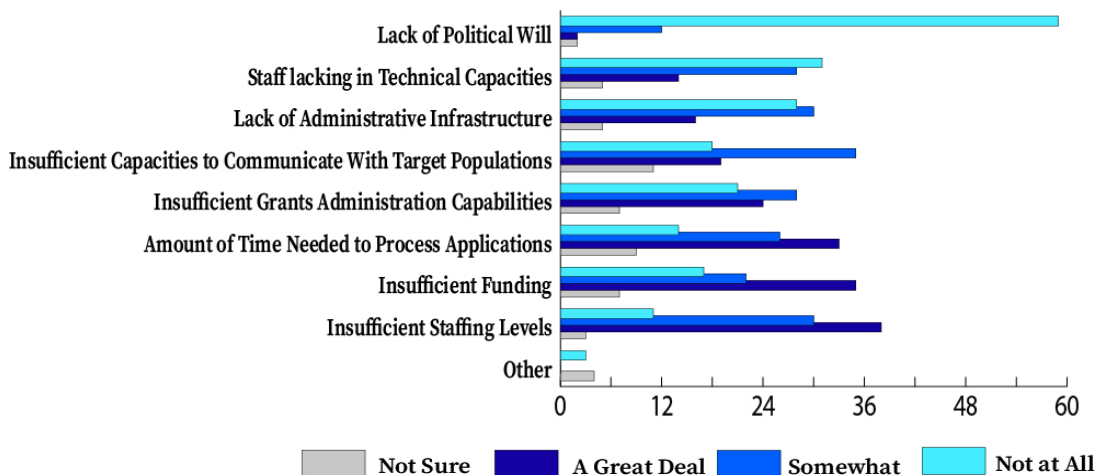
### *Capacity Challenges Impact the Emergency Housing Policy/Program Implementation*

Even policies designed with equity in mind - in terms of stated policy goals, target populations, and implementation strategies - may fall short of advancing equity in practice due to capacity challenges. We asked two survey questions – one focused on administrative capacity and other focused on relational capacity. Administrative capacity refers to staffing, funding, and other resource levels, as well as staff skills, agency infrastructure, and political will. Relational capacity refers to primarily to challenges related to reaching target populations but also includes challenges working with funding and implementation partners.

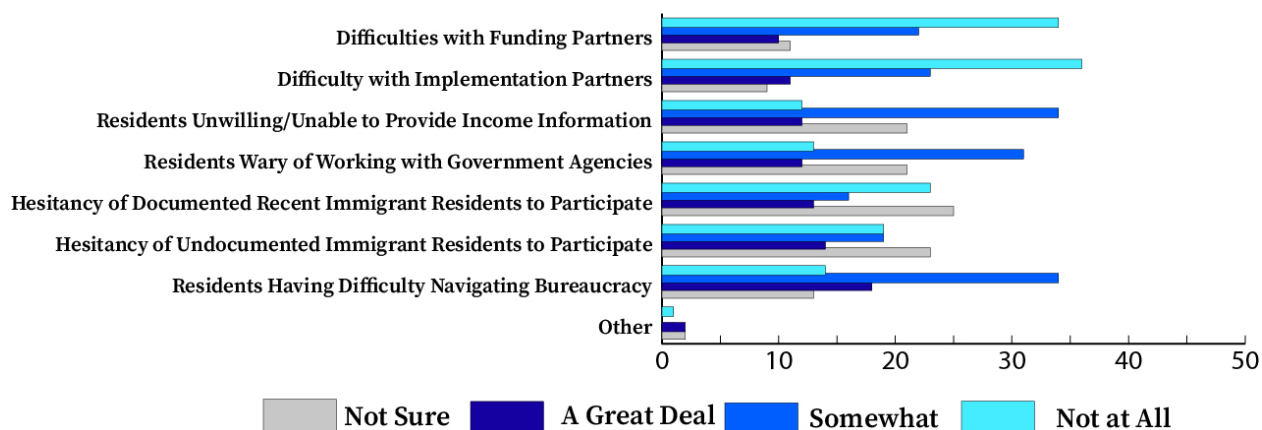
**Figure 12** shows that many experienced administrative capacity challenges, with insufficient staffing levels topping the list, followed by insufficient funding, the amount of time needed to process applications, and insufficient grants administration capabilities. **Figure 13** shows that many also experienced a range of relational capacity challenges. Residents having difficulty navigating the bureaucracy clearly tops the list. Responses to other options in this question were more varied, reflecting some uncertainty among respondents. The distinction between these two types of capacity challenges is important from an equity perspective because,

especially in an emergency context, facing administrative capacity challenges may be unavoidable – and many of those may be harder to overcome even in a non-emergency context. Relational capacity challenges, while difficult to navigate in an emergency context, may be more effectively addressed moving forward if cities provide training to staff or adopt communications more consistent with equity, for example.

**Figure 12: Administrative Capacity Challenges for Emergency Housing**



**Figure 13: Relational Capacity for Challenges to Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=79)**



The survey included a stand-alone open-ended question asking what challenges or obstacles cities faced in achieving their emergency housing policy/program goals. Responses to this question provide specific anecdotes that help illustrate the broad categories of administrative and relational capacity challenges identified in the closed-ended questions. A large number (49 responses) pointed to the inability to meet demand and staffing constraints. Small agencies had

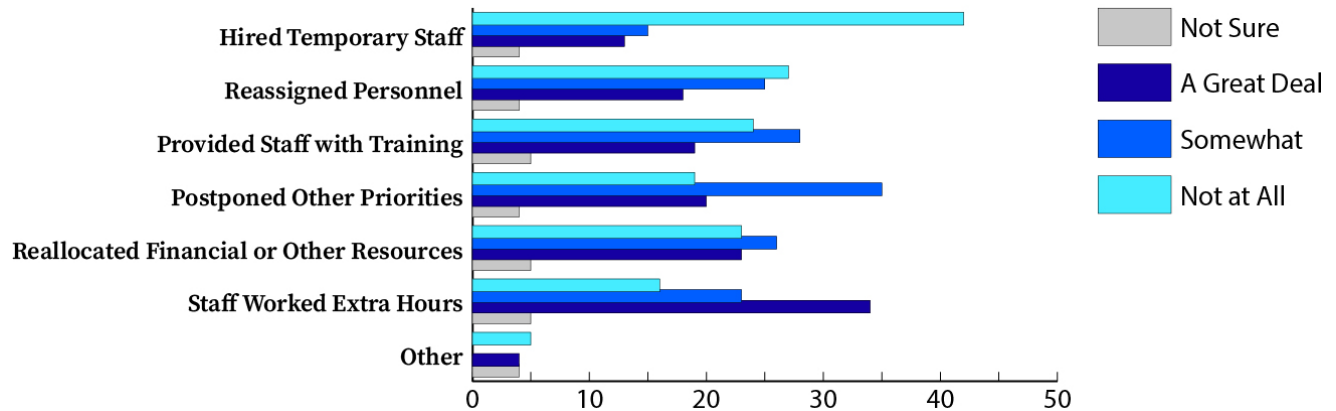
difficulty trying to fill large staffing gaps. The agencies lacked the staff, funds, and resources (e.g., land), and were unable to pay living wages to support the staff needed. As the city of Santa Ana stated, “We faced a myriad of staffing and internal capacity challenges to achieve our emergency housing program goals. We reassigned staff from their job responsibilities; hired temporary employees; contracted with nonprofit partners in the community; among other solutions that we undertook to respond to the emergency.” Other obstacles to emergency housing implementation that were not very widely cited include unclear and overlapping policies and, in one case, a lack of community support, commonly referred to as “NIMBY-ism” (Not In My Back Yard).

As reported above, two of the response options for the questions about capacity challenges are directly related to funding – one about difficulties with funding partners and another about reallocating financial resources. In addition, many of the other capacity challenges, especially administrative ones, are likely impacted by the availability of funding for policy/program implementation. To get a sense of whether funding, particularly a city’s reliance on funding partners, could have played a role in these capacity challenges, we asked a separate question about sources of funding for emergency housing policies/programs and found that federal (68%), state (64%), and local (57%) government sources were identified most frequently while no other funding source came close to any of these governmental sources (**Table 9**). Survey respondents could “choose all that apply” in response to this question and many did, indicating a propensity to fund these policies/programs by leveraging funding from other sources. These findings reveal cities’ interdependence on other levels of government and nongovernmental funders. Those funders may facilitate or constrain a city’s ability to incorporate equity principles into policy design or equity practices into policy implementation.

<b>Table 9: Sources of Funding for Emergency Housing Policies/Programs (n=84)</b>		
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Federal Government	68%	57
State Government	64%	54
Local Government	57%	48
Corporations	5%	4
Public or Private Foundations	7%	6
Individual Philanthropy	8%	7
Donor Advised Funds	5%	4
Other	8%	7
Not Sure	11%	9

When asked about strategies used to address implementation challenges, respondents most frequently indicated some version of “doing more with less”, most frequently citing staff working more hours, reallocating financial or other resources, and postponing other priorities. Still, roughly 20% of respondents indicated that they did not use these strategies at all. Providing staff with training and reassigning personnel were strategies used to some degree by a plurality of respondents (**Figure 14**).

**Figure 14: Strategies Used to Address Implementation Challenges (n=78)**



### *COVID-19 Era Emergency Housing Policies May Impact the Future of Equity in Housing Policy*

Respondents were clear that the housing policy environment has changed over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (55 responses). While challenges were great, many policies were adopted and cities reported good news of additional priorities, resources, and focus on housing and homelessness as well as response from city agencies, CBOs, and residence to prioritize and support these.

Antioch described the ways the attention has also brought “lots more discussion of alternatives, racial equity (COVID health discrepancies really opened eyes) [so that] work on new housing element may incorporate further changes.” Despite the benefits, there are still challenges of staffing and working in a financially competitive environment. Rural and tourist areas like South Lake Tahoe identified new problems resulting from an influx of new residents moving to those places, driving prices upward, and displacing longer-term residents, many of whom work in local businesses that cater to tourists.

In terms of whether policies from this environment will be made permanent (56 responses), cities reported engaging in discussion to make these policies and programs permanent. Those noted include Project Homekey, Project Roomkey, rent stabilization, just cause evictions, temporary housing/shelters, permanent supportive housing, rental assistance, RV Safe Parking and others.

### **CONCLUSION: IS THERE HOPE FOR SUSTAINING EQUITY APPROACHES IN THE LONG-TERM?**

An important takeaway, we believe, is that COVID-19 served as a focusing event that encouraged – perhaps emboldened - policymakers to pay more attention to the drivers of inequity and to the intersections of various dimensions of inequity – economic, racial, and health. As we join advocates and social equity-minded policymakers seeking to reimagine and reframe the need for inclusionary housing policies as a policy solution intended to advance the intersectional dimensions of social equity, we conclude that there is hope on the horizon, but still plenty of

work to be done to advance the equity principles and practices in affordable housing policies beyond an emergency context.

Our key findings point to some widely accepted “promising practices” for advancing equity in the field and identify policy goals and practices that, if replicated and sustained, could effectively address long-standing racial, economic, and health disparities. Examples include the ways in which cities identified target populations and then sought to ensure those target populations had the information and support needed to take up those policies. These findings are bolstered by our inventory of the number of California cities participating in equity initiatives because those initiatives often help cities develop their capacities (e.g., policies, practices, staff training) to think and act in equitable ways. At the same time, we distinguish capacity challenges that may be overcome with training and ongoing practice from those that are likely to persist due to limited funding and staffing resources.

While we found equity principles included in some emergency policies, we re-emphasize the distinction between having an immediate emergency response mindset and a long-term equity-focused social change mindset in policymaking/implementation. The legacy of emergency housing policy responses to COVID-19 may provide ongoing opportunities to think deeply and more fundamentally about how to address issues related to social determinants of health more fundamentally in policy action and embrace a broader equity-based vision of health and housing. However, while we found most emergency housing policies have not expired, questions remain about which will continue, for how long, and whether the focus on equity will persist as time moves on. In addition, at this time we do not have data about whether or how these policies impacted equity outcomes. One open question is whether policymakers will revert to “business as usual.”

Ensuring all people have access to affordable and adequate housing is a wicked and persistent problem in California that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to persist. Effective policy solutions will recognize that wickedness, including its origins in historic systems that perpetuate intersecting economic, racial, and health inequities. That recognition must be reflected in policy goals and implementation practices, including providing the funding, staff training, and other resources needed to evaluate their effectiveness, sustain the ones that work well, and remedy the ones that do not.

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